

Native Plants That Benefit Native Wildlife in the Florida Panhandle¹

Holly K. Ober and Gary W. Knox²

Florida ranks very high (7th) among all 50 states in the United States in biodiversity when we consider just the number of species of vertebrates and plants. Nationwide, Florida ranks 4th in number of reptile species and 5th in number of bird species. Florida hosts nearly 400 species of birds, 90 species of reptiles, 90 species of mammals, and 60 species of amphibians. This biodiversity is not only enjoyable to observe, it is also valuable to the natural environment. Animals help maintain the health of our natural systems through the many important roles they play in our complex food webs, acting as herbivores (eating plants), carnivores (eating other animals), scavengers (eating dead plant and animal material), and assisting with essential natural processes such as pollination and seed dispersal.

The key to enhancing wildlife (and attracting it to your property) is to provide the resources wildlife need. This means supplying food, water, and cover within the space you own and manage. Because the needs of each wildlife species for food and cover vary from one season to the next, a mix of plant species is required to meet the needs of a species all year round. And because each species has different needs, attracting and maintaining a wide variety of wildlife year round requires a wide diversity of plants. A property owner interested in attracting wildlife should nurture a wide variety of native plants to ensure that there is a large assortment of food and cover options available all the time.

Advantages of Using Native Plants

“Native” in this document refers to wildlife and plant species with natural ranges in the Panhandle of Florida. Native plants and wildlife evolved together in communities, so they complement each other’s needs. Furthermore, native plants are suited to the local climate, which means that within the historical range of weather conditions, and when properly sited, they can survive without fertilization, irrigation, and cold protection. Non-native plants from other parts of the world may provide some of the resources needed by native wildlife. However, their benefits can come with a high cost.

Non-native plants become “naturalized” if they establish self-sustaining populations. Nearly one-third of the plants currently growing wild in Florida are not native! Some of these naturalized plants have become “invasive,” displacing native plants and animals in natural areas and disrupting natural patterns of water flow, fire, animal movement, and animal foraging. These invasive species cost millions of taxpayer dollars to control.

In years past, some highly palatable and prolifically fruiting exotic species were planted and promoted by wildlife enthusiasts before their negative effects on the natural world became apparent. Some examples of invasive plants we caution *against* include Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*), and coral ardisia (*Ardisia crenata*). Many of the benefits provided by

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2. Holly K. Ober, associate professor/Extension specialist, Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation; and Gary W. Knox, professor/Extension specialist, Department of Environmental Horticulture. UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

these invasive species could instead be provided by native species we describe below.

By choosing to use native plants and removing non-native invasive plants, you can attract and enhance wildlife and prevent non-native invasive plants from disrupting natural areas. In this document we provide recommendations for plants native to the Florida Panhandle region that provide benefits to wildlife. Below, we describe which wildlife species benefit from each plant, what resources the plant provides to wildlife, what time of year those resources are available, and the growing conditions under which each plant species thrives (i.e., soil moisture, sun exposure). This list is not exhaustive. We have limited coverage to plant species generally available for purchase from local nurseries and to plant species with known benefits to birds, mammals, and/or reptiles (although we note when these plants provide benefits to some insects). Beware that some of the fruit-bearing plants recommended for wildlife can be messy if they are planted near a driveway, sidewalk, or patio!

Sources of additional information

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Table 1. Vines





Common name (Latin name)	Benefits to wildlife	Growing conditions
Crossvine, trumpet flower (<i>Bignonia capreolata</i>)	Nectar and pollen for hummingbirds; browse for deer (red-yellow flowers spring–summer) 	Full sun to full shade Medium- to well-drained soil
Trumpet creeper (<i>Campsis radicans</i>)	Nectar and pollen for butterflies, hummingbirds; browse for deer (orange-red flowers spring–summer) 	Full sun to full shade Best in medium-drained soil, but tolerant of all soil types
Yellow jessamine (<i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i>)	Nectar and pollen for butterflies, hummingbirds; browse for deer (yellow flowers in spring) 	Full sun to partial shade Medium- to well-drained soil
Trumpet honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>)	Nectar and pollen for butterflies, hummingbirds; berries for songbirds; browse for deer (red flowers in summer; red fruits in fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained soil

Table 2. Annuals/Perennials





























Common name (Latin name)	Benefits to wildlife	Growing conditions
Tickseeds (<i>Coreopsis floridana</i> , <i>C. integrifolia</i> , <i>C. leavenworthii</i> , <i>C. lanceolata</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies; forage for gopher tortoises, deer (yellow flowers summer–fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Species vary in soil tolerance Grows up to 4’ tall, 2’ wide
Firewheel, blanket flower (<i>Gaillardia pulchella</i>)	Nectar and pollen for butterflies; seeds for songbirds; forage for gopher tortoises (yellow/orange/red flowers in summer; seeds in fall) 	Full sun Well-drained soil Grows up to 2’ tall, 3’ wide
Cardinal flower (<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>)	Nectar and pollen for butterflies, hummingbirds (red flowers in summer) 	Full sun to partial shade Medium-drained to wet soil Grows up to 3’ tall, 1’ wide
Pinnate prairie coneflower (<i>Ratibida pinnata</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies; seeds for songbirds (yellow flowers in summer; seeds in fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained soil Grows up to 5’ tall
Orange coneflower (<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies; seeds for songbirds; forage for gopher tortoises (yellow flowers in summer; seeds in fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained soil Grows up to 3’ tall
Scarlet sage (<i>Salvia coccinea</i>)	Nectar and pollen for butterflies, hummingbirds (red flowers summer–fall) 	Full sun Well-drained soil Grows up to 3’ tall

Table 3. Shrubs/Small Trees

Common name (Latin name)	Benefits to wildlife	Growing conditions
Red buckeye, Florida buckeye (<i>Aesculus pavia</i>)	Nectar and pollen for butterflies, hummingbirds (red flowers in spring) 	Full shade to partial shade Well-drained to medium-drained soil Grows 15–25' tall
American beautyberry (<i>Callicarpa americana</i>)	Fruit for songbirds, quail, foxes, opossums, raccoons; browse for deer (purple berries in late summer and fall) 	Partial shade Well-drained soil Grows up to 5' tall, 5' wide
American hornbeam, ironwood (<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>)	Larval food plant for butterflies; nutlets for songbirds, turkeys, wood ducks, squirrels, deer (inconspicuous orange-yellow flowers in spring; nutlets in fall) 	Full sun to full shade Well-drained to wet soil Grows 20–30' tall, 20–25' wide
Buttonbush (<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies; seeds for waterfowl; cover and nesting for waterfowl, wading birds, songbirds (white flowers in summer; seeds from nutlets in fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Medium-drained to wet soil Grows 9–30' tall, 6–8' wide
Fringe tree (<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees; berries for songbirds (white flowers in spring; blue/black berries in summer) 	Full sun to full shade Well-drained to medium-drained soil Grows 12–20' tall, 10–15' wide
Summer sweet, sweet pepperbush (<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds (white flowers in summer) 	Full sun to full shade Medium-drained to wet soil Grows 4–9' tall
Flowering dogwood (<i>Cornus florida</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees; fruit for songbirds, woodpeckers, turkeys, mice, chipmunks, foxes, squirrels, beavers, bears, deer; browse for rabbits, deer; cover for songbirds (white flowers in spring; red berries in fall) 	Partial to full shade Well-drained soil Grows 20–40' tall
Hawthorn (<i>Crataegus aestivalis</i> , <i>C. flava</i> , <i>C. marshallii</i>)	Fruit for songbirds, turkeys, gopher tortoises, squirrels, rabbits, foxes; browse for deer; cover for songbirds (white flowers in spring; fruit in fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained to wet soil Grows 20–30' tall and wide
Coralbean, Cherokee bean (<i>Erythrina herbacea</i>)	Nectar and pollen for butterflies, hummingbirds (red flowers in spring) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained to medium-drained soil Grows 5–10' tall, 8–12' wide
Florida privet (<i>Forestiera segregata</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies; berries for birds; nesting cover for birds (inconspicuous yellow flowers in late winter and early spring; purple fruit in summer) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained to medium-drained soil Grows 4–15' tall
Dahoon holly (<i>Ilex cassine</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies; berries for songbirds; browse for deer (inconspicuous white flowers in spring, red fruits in fall) 	Full sun to full shade Medium-drained to wet soil Grows 20–30' high, 15–20' wide
Possumhaw (<i>Ilex decidua</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds (inconspicuous white flowers in spring) 	Full sun to full shade Well-drained to wet soil Grows 10–15' tall, 10–15' wide

Common name (Latin name)	Benefits to wildlife	Growing conditions
Gallberry, inkberry (<i>Ilex glabra</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees; berries for songbirds, quail, turkeys, raccoons, coyotes, opossums; forage for gopher tortoises; browse for deer, rabbits (inconspicuous white flowers in summer; green/black fruits in fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Medium-drained to wet soil Grows 4–8' tall
Yaupon holly (other than dwarf forms) (<i>Ilex vomitoria</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies; berries for songbirds, turkeys, raccoons, squirrels; browse for deer; nesting cover for songbirds year-round (inconspicuous white flowers in fall; red fruits in winter) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained to wet soil Grows 15–30' tall, 6–20' wide
Wax myrtle, southern bayberry (<i>Myrica cerifera</i>)	Nectar and pollen for butterflies; berries for birds; seeds for songbirds, turkeys, quail (inconspicuous green flowers in spring; fruit and seeds fall–winter) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained to wet soil Grows 10–40' tall, 20–25' wide
Chickasaw plum (<i>Prunus angustifolia</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies; berries for songbirds, gopher tortoises; cover for songbirds, quail (white flowers late winter–early spring; red-yellow fruit in summer) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained soil Grows up to 20' tall
Carolina cherry laurel (<i>Prunus caroliniana</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees; berries for songbirds; cover for songbirds. Note: Can be toxic to humans and livestock (showy clusters of inconspicuous white flowers in early spring; black berries late summer–fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Moist to well-drained soil Grows up to 30' tall
Flatwoods plum, hog plum (<i>Prunus umbellata</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees; fruit for gopher tortoises, foxes, opossums, raccoons, deer, bears; browse for deer (white flowers in spring; red-purple fruit summer–fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained to wet soil Grows 12–20' tall and wide
Common elderberry (<i>Sambucus nigra</i>)	Berries for songbirds; browse for deer (white flowers in spring and summer; black fruits available in fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained to wet soil Grows up to 12' tall
Saw palmetto (<i>Serenoa repens</i>)	Berries for gopher tortoises, mammals; cover for birds and mammals (black berries in summer) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained soil Grows up to 6' tall Sometimes poor survival after planting
Sparkleberry, tree huckleberry (<i>Vaccinium arboreum</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies; berries for songbirds, quail, gopher tortoises, bears; browse for deer, rabbits; nesting cover for songbirds (white flowers in spring; fruit in summer) 	Partial sun to full shade Medium- to well-drained soil Grows up to 20' tall
Highbush blueberry (<i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees; berries for songbirds, quail, turkeys, gopher tortoises, rabbits, squirrels, bears, deer (white flowers in spring; blue fruits in summer) 	Full sun to partial shade Medium- to well-drained soil Grows up to 12' tall

























Common name (Latin name)	Benefits to wildlife	Growing conditions
Shiny blueberry (<i>Vaccinium myrsinites</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees; berries for songbirds, turkeys, quail, gopher tortoises; browse for deer (blue/black berries in summer) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained soil Grows up to 3' tall
Deerberry, dangleberry (<i>Vaccinium stamineum</i>)	Nectar and pollen for butterflies; berries for songbirds, gopher tortoises (white flowers in spring; blue fruits in summer) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained soil Grows up to 15' tall but 3–6' is more common
Possumhaw (<i>Viburnum nudum</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies; berries for songbirds (white flowers in spring; blue/black fruits in summer) 	Shade to partial shade Medium-drained to wet soil Grows up to 20' tall
Walter's viburnum (<i>Viburnum obovatum</i>)	Nectar and pollen for bees; berries for songbirds; nesting cover for songbirds year-round (white flowers winter–spring; red/black fruits in fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained soil Grows 8–25' tall, 6–10' wide

Table 4. Trees

Common name (Latin name)	Benefits to wildlife	Growing conditions
Hickory (<i>Carya aquatica</i> , <i>C. glabra</i> , <i>C. illinoensis</i> , <i>C. tomentosa</i>)	Nuts for turkeys, ducks, squirrels 	Full sun to full shade Well-drained soil Grows 30–100' tall
Persimmon (<i>Diospyros virginiana</i>)	Fruit for opossums, raccoons, foxes, deer; browse for deer; cover for songbirds (yellow-orange fruit in summer) 	Full sun to full shade Well-drained soil Grows up to 50' tall
American beech (<i>Fagus grandifolia</i>)	Larval food for moths; nuts for songbirds, ducks, squirrels, chipmunks (nuts in fall) 	Full to partial shade Medium-drained to wet soil Grows up to 100' tall
Tulip poplar, yellow poplar (<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>)	Nectar for hummingbirds; fruit for songbirds, quail, rabbits, squirrels; cover for songbirds; browse for deer (yellow-orange flowers in late spring; fruit in fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained soil Grows up to 200' tall
Southern magnolia (<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>)	Seeds for squirrels, opossums, quail, and turkeys; cover for songbirds (white flowers in spring–summer) 	Full sun to partial shade Medium-drained to wet soil Grows up to 65' tall, 30' wide
Sweetbay (<i>Magnolia virginiana</i>)	Larval food for butterflies; seeds for songbirds; browse for bears, deer; cover for songbirds (white flowers in spring–summer) 	Full sun to partial shade Medium-drained to wet soil Grows 40–60' tall
Red mulberry (<i>Morus rubra</i>)	Nectar, pollen, and larval food source for butterflies; berries for songbirds, ducks, woodpeckers, opossums, raccoons, squirrels; browse for deer (inconspicuous green flowers in spring–summer; pinkish-black berries in fall) 	Full sun to full shade Well-drained to wet soil Grows up to 60' tall
Blackgum (<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>)	Fruit for songbirds, turkeys; browse for deer; cover for songbirds (blue fruit in fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained to wet soil Grows up to 120' tall
White oak (<i>Quercus alba</i>)	Acorns for ducks, quail, turkeys, squirrels, rabbits, bears, deer; browse for deer, rabbits; nesting cover for songbirds (acorns in fall) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained soil Grows 100' tall
Laurel oak, diamond-leaf oak (<i>Quercus laurifolia</i>)	Acorns for ducks, quail, turkeys, raccoons, squirrels, deer; nesting cover for songbirds (acorns in winter) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained soil Grows 70' tall

Common name (Latin name)	Benefits to wildlife	Growing conditions
Sabal palm (<i>Sabal palmetto</i>)	Fruit for songbirds, gopher tortoises, raccoons, squirrels; cover for songbirds, bats, frogs, lizards (black berries in summer) 	Full sun to partial shade Well-drained to wet soil Grows up to 60' tall, 15' wide
 Provides food for bees  Provides food for butterflies and/or moths  Provides food for hummingbirds  Provides food for ducks and/or waterfowl  Provides food or nesting cover for songbirds  Provides food for ground-nesting birds (northern bobwhite quail, wild turkey)  Provides food or cover for gopher tortoises and/or other reptiles and amphibians  Provides food for medium-sized mammals such as foxes, opossums, rabbits, chipmunks, and/or squirrels  Provides food for large mammals such as deer and/or bears		